"those enduring matinee idols"

A CHRONOLOGICAL LOOK AT SOUND SERIALS (1929 - 1956)

CHAPTER 17
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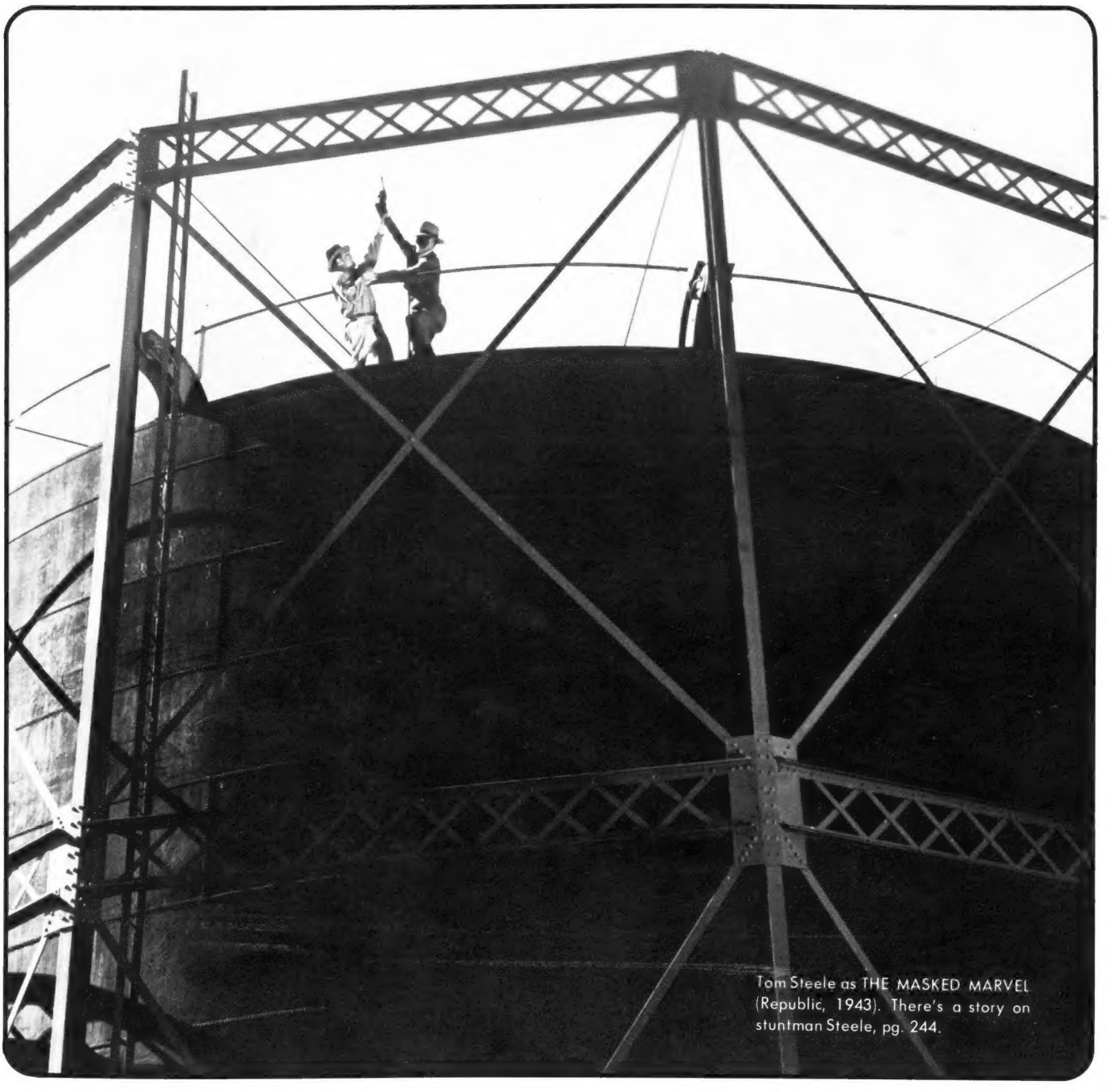


Tom Steele as THE MASKED MARVEL (Republic, 1943). There's a story on stuntman Steele, pg. 244.

MASTHEAD: Kane Richmond and Carol Forman.

Written for TEMI By
ERIC HOFFMAN / BOB MALCOMSON

DAREDEVILS is a prime example of Republic Pictures' cliff-hangers at their best. In fact, there are many who label it the finest "sound" serial ever made. It is as exciting to watch today as it was when originally released on June 10, 1939.

That DAREDEVILS came out as well as it did is a tribute to the teamwork of directors William Witney and John English. Working with a top-notch script, they brought to realization a perfect blend of vehement action and pulsating suspense.

For the title heroes (there were three), the casting office made a wise choice in its players. The part of Gene Townley, "world's professional high diver and all-around athlete" and the apparent "brains" of the trio of Daredevils, was awarded to Charles Quigley. He made a believable hero, displaying definite acting ability and a winning personality.

Tiny Dawson, the strongman of the group, was portrayed by Herman Brix. This was to be his seventh and last serial appearance. Later he changed his acting name to Bruce Bennett and enjoyed a long career in feature films and T.V.

To portray Burt Knowles, "famous escape artist," David Sharpe, one of the top stuntmen in the industry (see pg. 101), was cast. Ironically, during the action segments Sharpe was doubled by fellow stunter Jimmy Fawcett. This was necessary because of Sharpe's feature part in the serial. If he had been injured, considerable time and money would have been lost thru either filming around him or replacing him.

20-year-old Carole Landis was chosen as the heroine, Blanche Granville. Her good looks and figure, and, yes, natural acting talent, paved the way to eventual stardom in motion pictures—tho, the real beginning of the road cannot be attributed to DAREDEVILS, but rather "One Million B.C." (released less than a year later) as the scantily clad sweetheart of Victor Mature. The end of the road came in 1948 for Miss Landis, when, at 29, she took her own life.

Miles Mander had probably the most difficult assignment in the serial, a dual role : He was the millionaire industrialist Horace Granville, and the "disguised" Harry Crowel. Mander's skillfull transition from kindly, sympathetic grandfather (of Blanche) to cold, precise criminal genius Crowel was a joy to watch. To heighten the double illusion, Republic came up with excellent split screen photography for the sequences where Granville and his look-alike imposter (Crowel) converse.

As the "real" Harry Crowel, who chooses to call himself by his old prison number 39013 (pronounced 39-0-13), Charles Middleton gave another bravura performance. His satanic features, deep, ringing voice, and expertise acting when outlining evil plots made 39013 a role as memorable as his prior offerings as Pa Stark in DICK TRACY RETURNS, and Ming the Merciless in the Flash Gordon serials.

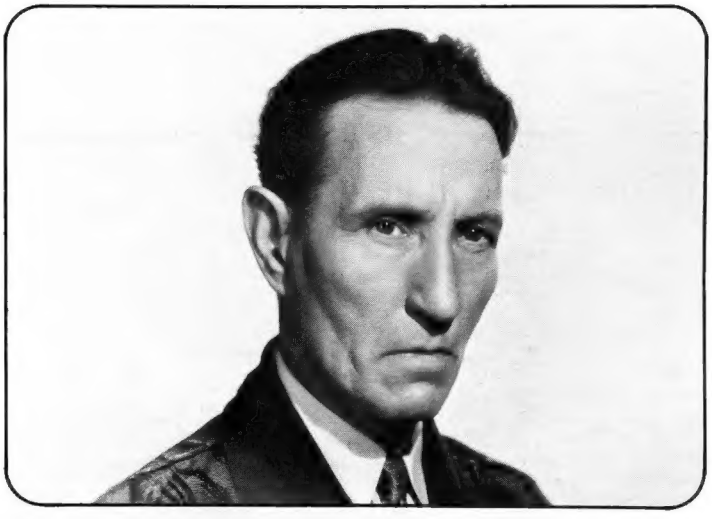
Strong plus-factors of the serial were the background music from William Lava (and Cy Feuer, not credited on screen), which lent tremendous impact to the action . . . and the special effects wizardry of Howard Lydecker and his crew. Anyone who has witnessed Lydecker's tunnel flood at the conclusion of Chapter one would find it difficult to believe that the cascading water scenes are not real, but rather filmed in miniature. The sequence is truly a "seat-gripper."

•

CHAPTER TITLES

1. **The Monstrous Plot**
2. **The Mysterious Friend**
3. **The Executioner**
4. **Sabotage**
5. **The Ray of Death**
6. **Thirty Seconds to Live**
7. **The Flooded Mine**
8. **S. O. S.**
9. **Ladder of Peril**
10. **The Infernal Machine**
11. **The Red Circle Speaks**
12. **Flight to Doom**

Original Screen Play
Barry Shipman • Franklyn Adreon
Rex Taylor • Ronald Davidson
Sol Shor



Harry Crowel (Charles Middleton) escapes from prison and proceeds to carry on a campaign of destruction and revenge against his former partner, Horace Granville, who had him sent to prison 15 years prior. "When I get thru with Horace Granville, he'll be entirely ruined." Crowel is generally referred to by his prison number, 39013. ①

The Granville Amusement Center becomes a target of 39013. It is there, during a matinee performance of their act, that the heroes of the story are introduced: the "Daredevils of the Red Circle—World's Most Famous Stunt Trio." (2)

The trio consists of Burt Knowles (David Sharpe); Tiny Dawson (Herman Brix), and Gene Townley (Charles Quigley). Included in the "family" are Tuffie, a collie shephard, and Gene's kid brother, Sammy (Robert Winkler). (3)

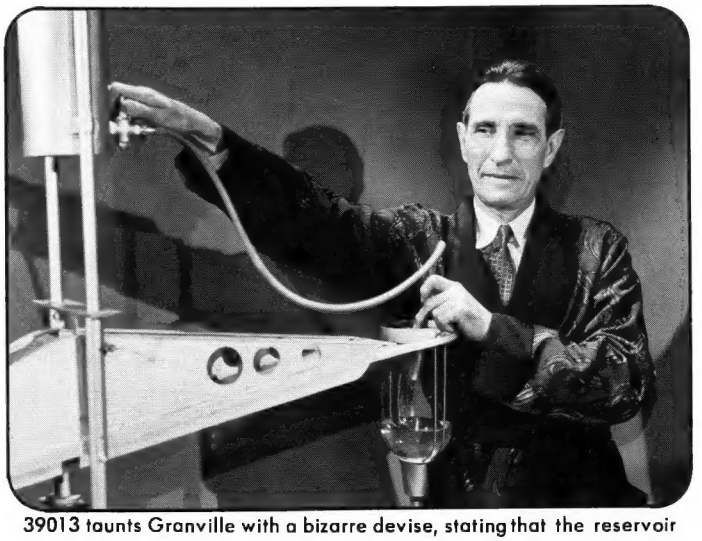
39013 strikes! His henchmen, prior to the evening performance, place gasoline in the water tank used by the Daredevils in their act. When Gene drops a lighted flare from atop the 80-foot ladder into the tank all hell breaks loose. The amusement center becomes a raging inferno. Trapped are Blanche Granville (Carole Landis) and Sammy. (4)

Blanche and Sammy are rescued by the Daredevils, tho the youngster dies from his injuries. The trio go to Horace Granville's mansion to offer their services in helping track down 39013. At first rejected by Dixon, Granville's chief of security, Blanche offers to intercede. She phones Jeff that she wants to see her grandfather. (5)

Granville (Miles Mander), because of a "mysterious stroke," must remain in sterilized quarters. Hence a glass partition separates him from the remainder of the house. His contact with others is via a microphone. Only Granville's physician, Dr. Malcolm (C. Montague Shaw), and private nurse, Jeff (Ray Miller), have direct access to him. (6)

Granville, at Blanche's urging, has Dixon put the Daredevils on his payroll, plus provides them with "comfortable quarters." Later he departs the glass enclosure and goes into the room behind, his study. The kindly grandfather personality abruptly becomes cold, precise. He exits thru a secret panel and descends to a hidden cellar. (7)

In the basement is a jail cell, and behind bars is the *real* Horace Granville. The bogus Granville sits down at a theatrical make-up table and proceeds to remove an ingenious wig and mask, revealing 39013. (8)



39013 taunts Granville with a bizarre devise, stating that the reservoir bottle, dripping water, must be continuously refilled otherwise the balance will tip and "these lethal gas capsules will break upon the floor." Thus, if 39013 is ever detained and cannot replenish the reservoir, Granville dies. (9)

"Granville" is successful in getting Blanche to agree to be the first to ride thru Channel Tunnel which the Daredevils are assigned by Dixon to "patrol". That night a cloaked figure slips a note under the door of the Daredevils' room—"Your Lives are in Danger at the Tunnel: Be on your Guard!" Behind the handprinted message is a red circle. (10)

The final reel (of three, lasting in total nearly 28 minutes) provides one of the most exciting cliffhangers in serial history.

Gene rides ahead of a tunnel inspection car on a motorcycle. He hears an ominous booming sound. Sheffield (George Chesebro), who works for Dixon, but is actually an agent of 39013, dismisses it. With Sheffield in the car are Tiny and Burt.

Meanwhile, back in the hidden basement at the Granville mansion, 39013 outlines his diabolical plan to destroy the Channel Tunnel (extending from the mainland to Santa Alicia Island) to a horrified Granville. Showing the imprisoned Granville a diagram of the tunnel, 39013 explains that his men have taken over one of the off-shore oil wells. Using an oil drill, his minions will rupture the shell of the tunnel, letting the ocean pour in!

On Santa Alicia Island, Gene, suspicious of a noise he heard in the tunnel, tries to make a phone call (apparently to the mainland). The line is dead. Sheffield tells the guards that Gene is bent on wrecking the tunnel. Tiny and Burt (who have been outside) burst into the room. A melee is on!

Gene, Tiny and Burt flee out a back door after Gene bolts the front door to prevent further help for Sheffield. Gene orders his pals to decoy the guards and meet him at the mainland entrance.

Mounting his motorcycle, Gene races into the tunnel. The oil drill bit makes its final thrusts. A crack appears in the curved roof!!! Water starts, slowly, to seep thru the fissure. Gene stops at an emergency telephone and frantically tries to reach the mainland, but to no avail. The motorcade, including Blanche, Landon and Dixon, proceeds into the tunnel.

Chunks of masonry fall from the tunnel ceiling. Gene returns to his motorcycle and streaks off. Seconds later, the roof caves in and a wall of water races thru the giant cavity.

The motorcade hears the roar of the water, and halts. As Dixon (Ben Taggart), Blanche, and Chief Landon (William Pagan) ponder what the noise is, they sight Gene racing on his motorcycle ahead of the water.

Gene tries to outdistance the torrent, an unstoppable juggernaut of death.

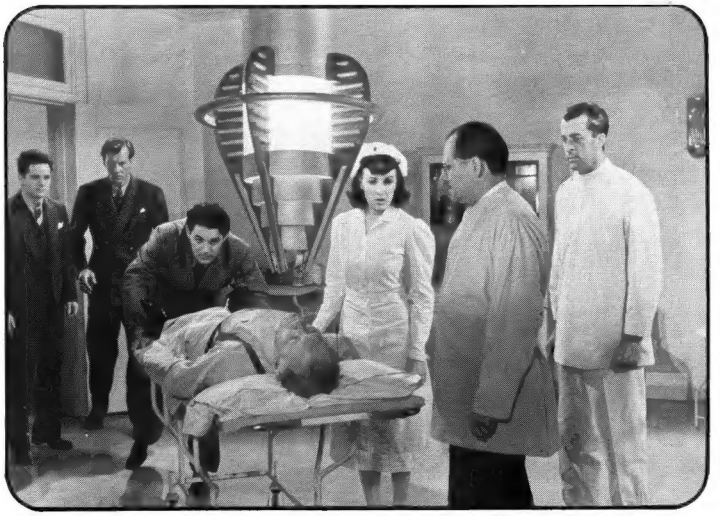
Blanche screams in horror as the wave of water roars toward the entire group and blots out the scene.

* * *

The escape shown in Chapter two was a bit of a cheat. We see Blanche scream. This is followed with a shot of Gene skidding to a stop beside a large valve wheel, which he frantically turns. The wheel controls two huge steel doors. They close together just as the wave of water hits.

Distrustful of his agent Stanley, 39013 orders him (in Chapter 3) to "take a little business trip . . . in the black sedan" in the Granville garage. Once inside the garage, Stanley is killed by deadly gas. The Daredevils find a note on their breakfast tray from the Red Circle telling them that "what you find in the garage is not suicide." (13)

Once the trio is in the garage, 39013 follows the same procedure he used to eliminate Stanley. Via remote controls, he closes and locks the garage door. Then he starts deadly gas pouring into the garage from the sprinkler system. In #4, Gene manages to get into the sedan and back it thru the garage door. (14)



Chapter 5 has the trio rushing into the Black Clinic where District Attorney Graves is about to undergo Gamma Ray treatment, but 39013 agents have changed the wiring circuit so that the machine becomes a deadly Delta Ray. When pushing the D.A. out of the way of the machine, Gene falls and is almost destroyed by the Ray. (15)

The cliffhanger for Chapter 7 has Gene stunned by a flash of electricity while on top of a high tension tower. He is sent hurtling to the ground below!

16

Gene crashes onto the roof of a station wagon. The roof breaks his fall and he rolls from it onto the ground. (Note: Stuntman George DeNormand stood in for Quigley here, and throughout the serial.)

17

Trapped inside a burning storage shed with no escape route, the Daredevils are further imperiled at the conclusion of Chapter 8 when a flaming oil derrick topples over and crashes down onto the shed. Luckily in #9 they discover asbestos fire-fighting suits so they can flee.

18

Gene chases Blake (Bert LeBaron) in Chapter 9 high atop an oil (or gasoline) storage tank. As Gene ascends a ladder, Blake pushes the ladder from the tank sending Gene hurtling to his doom below! But the base of the ladder wedges in a platform grating, halting it at an angle.

19

The Daredevils do battle with 39013's followers in Chapter 10. Blanche opens the door to "Granville's" quarters. Tuffie races in, jumps "Granville," and rips off his mask. 39013, Malcolm and Jeff escape thru a secret panel. (Note: The face of George DeNormand, doubling Quigley, is much in evidence fourth from right.)

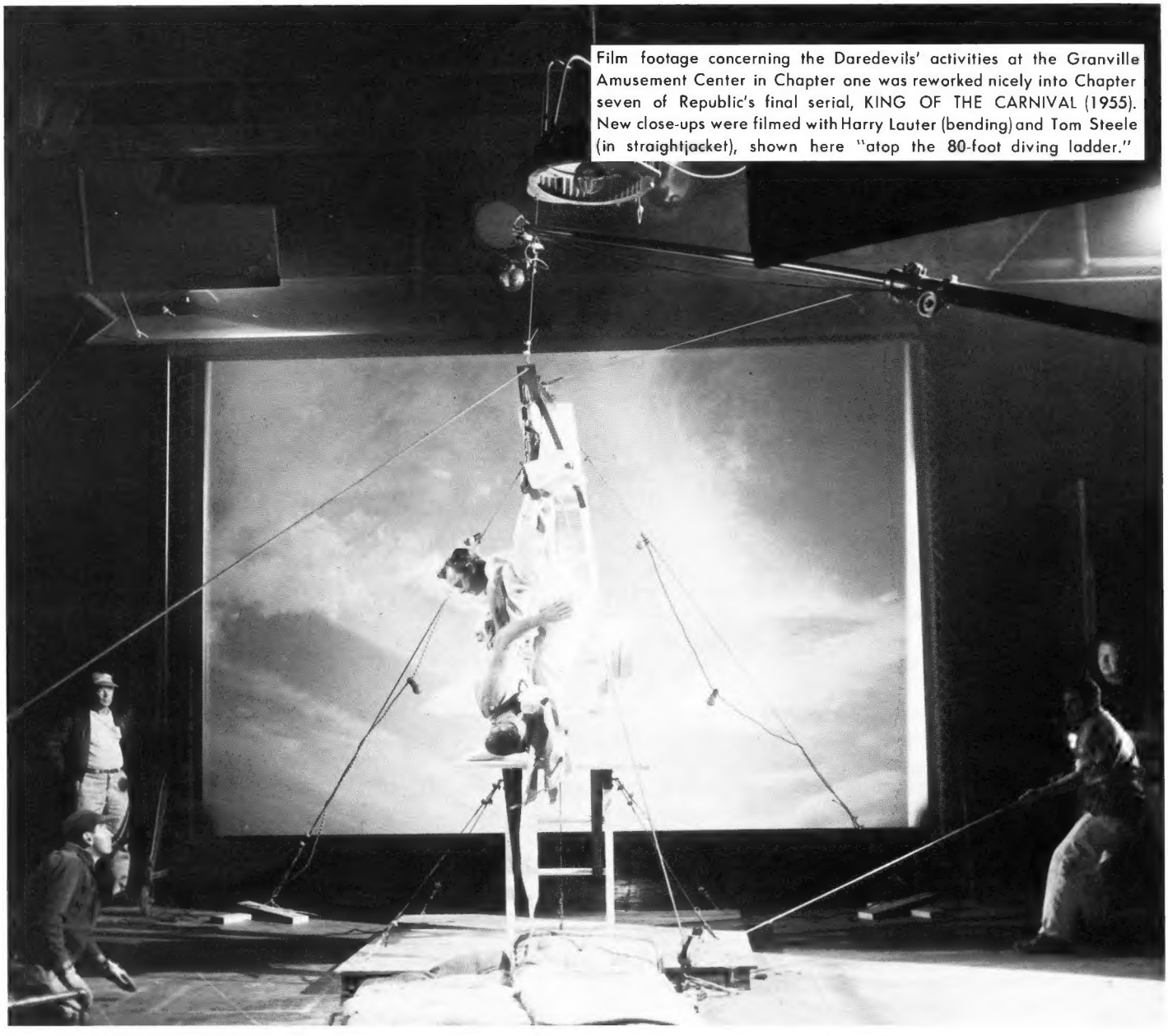
20

In the same episode, the real Granville is found just as the deadly gas pellets burst on the basement floor. 39013 sneaks back and closes a switch sending a steel door crashing down and trapping the Daredevils, Blanche and Granville. Tiny saves the day when he grabs a chair and halts the descent of the door.

21

Blanche reveals in Chapter 11 that she is the mysterious Red Circle who has sent helpful messages to the Daredevils throughout the story. Aware that 39013 was masquerading as her grandfather, she could not come forward until Granville's rescue. She is kidnapped by 39013 in the last episode, then saved. (22)

39013 has Jeff attach a bomb to Blanche's car, set to go off when the speedometer hits 70. Thru a quirk in fate, Malcolm (unaware of the bomb) winds up putting 39013—rendered unconscious in a fight with the Daredevils—into the rumble seat and takes off. When his speed reaches 70, the roadster blows up. THE END. (23)



Film footage concerning the Daredevils' activities at the Granville Amusement Center in Chapter one was reworked nicely into Chapter seven of Republic's final serial, KING OF THE CARNIVAL (1955). New close-ups were filmed with Harry Lauter (bending) and Tom Steele (in straightjacket), shown here "atop the 80-foot diving ladder."

An Interview With

SPENCER GORDON BENNET

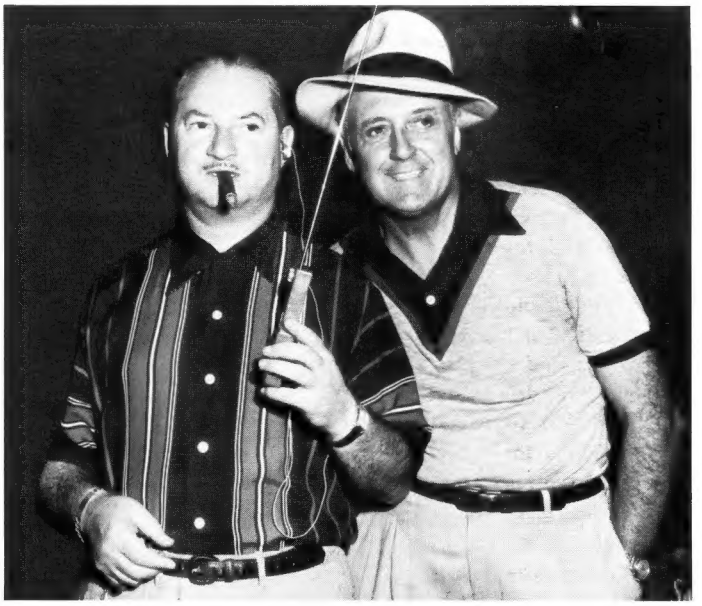
by Jon Tuska

Although we had corresponded previously, I first met Spencer in February, 1969, at the General Service Studio on Las Palmas Avenue. The occasion was a closed screening of what turned out to be the work-print of a very low budget feature "Bigfoot." Bennet proved an amazing man with a startlingly good memory. "Do you recognize this old cowpoke?" asked Robert F. Slatzer, director of "Bigfoot." "Sure," said Spencer. It was Ken Maynard, who had a small part in the picture. Ken and Spencer had worked together in the 'Thirties at Larry Darmour's studio, just down Santa Monica Boulevard from Mascot Pictures' old office. Maynard was 74, Spencer 76.

Two years hence, at Columbia Pictures' studio on Gower Street, since vacated, I met with Spencer again. Columbia was in the process of merging its production facility with Warner Brothers' Burbank studio. I saw Jack L. Warner in the hall outside the Western prop department. He was renting office space on the lot. I couldn't help reflecting on whether or not he planned to return to Burbank, but, no, he had arranged for other quarters in Beverly Hills. A print of "Avenging Waters" (Columbia, 1936) was screened, one of the Darmour Westerns with Maynard. Spencer remembered when and where every sequence was shot. Too bad it wasn't a better picture. The upcoming, young filmmakers in Hollywood are very interested in the old-timers. Max Lamb, producer of "Something Big," came to the screening; there were others. Afterwards, we held the interview, excerpts of which are to be found below.

Spencer is a fantastic person. Bored with static sequences of drama or dialogue, his work here frequently lacks vitality. Action was always his forte and, in this respect, he ranks among Hollywood's most notable action directors. Like Breezy Eason and Otto Brower, he specialized in what he liked best, and few could do as fine a job given the same materials and budgetary considerations. There is a peculiar artistry in the limited budget film. They never win awards. But to manufacture an entertaining feature in eight days, or an entire chapter play in three to four weeks, and for it to be consistently enjoyable and interesting is no small feat.

For the most part, I have skirted Spencer's formative years at Pathé and stressed, as space permits, his years at Republic and Columbia. Most of Spencer's serials were produced by Sam Katzman. Unlike Nat Levine or Henry MacRae, Sam had no particular affinity for the serial. As a result, Spencer was given much more freedom, while holding rigidly to the budget, than directors generally had either at Mascot/Republic or Universal. When Nat Levine was eased out of Republic, the studio came to rely strongly on a supervisory unit system, because Herbert J. Yates knew almost nothing of production methods. Columbia, for its post-war serials, appointed Katzman, long an independent producer, to head up their serial unit. The budgets seldom exceeded $100,000, including purchase of literary rights to comic strip characters, with Katzman's salary charged to production overhead and a fifty-fifty split on profits after costs were recouped. Spencer never got the slickness into his work that Jack English and William Witney did at Republic, where every stunt was performed with the precision of circus acrobatics, thereby losing some degree of verisimilitude. For others, action sequences were as much formula affairs as the story-lines, never for Spencer.



Sam Katzman (left) and Spencer Gordon Bennet in 1953.

Between the years 1947-1956, Spencer directed twenty-one serials for Columbia, as the principal in a co-directorship, or as a solo performance. Whatever quality these chapter plays have in terms of production, credit must go to Spencer, rather than Katzman. While Columbia assigned a supervisor, his job was money; Spencer was very much on his own. Katzman's activity, other than monitoring costs, was largely confined to screening rushes. Occasionally, he fired people. Spencer never questioned his material, but made the best of it. BLAZING THE OVERLAND TRAIL, the last American studio serial, released by Columbia in 1956, was created by means of shooting around substantial segments of OVERLAND WITH KIT CARSON (Columbia, 1939), with Dennis Moore costumed identically to Bill Elliott in the earlier entry, and Lee Roberts dressed as Richard Fiske. Blocking each segment for production consisted chiefly of matching shots with OVERLAND footage. At best, it was a sad farewell. Spencer was charged with the direction, completing the forty-second year of his association with serial production.

JT: Spencer, of all the serials you have made, is there any one from the sound era which stands out in your mind?

SB: I like the first one I made at Republic, SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA ('43). We spent around $160,000 on it. It had fifteen episodes and had good actors . . . it was a fine production. And it stands out to me. I thought I worked out the fights better than usual. I think I shot the picture in twenty-four days, maybe a little over. I didn't have a co-director on it, but later on they began alternating directors: one would shoot, the other would prepare for the next day . . . while he was shooting, the other director would prepare.

JT: Well, didn't you really start that at Pathé, with George B. Seitz?

SB: You might say so.

JT: That was their pattern, wasn't it?

SB: That was their pattern, yes, and it worked out pretty well. I directed about fifty percent of the Pearl White serials.

JT: All the books say she did her own stunts. Is that true?

SB: That is not true. I remember a Seitz picture, I forget the name of it [Author's note: PLUNDER (Pathé, 1923)], but Pearl White was being chased and she jumps onto a bus.

As she runs up to the top of the bus, it passes under an elevator. She is supposed to grab the elevator structure, and then catch a passing train to escape. As the bus was going under this structure, you didn't have to jump far, but you had to jump sideways, otherwise you would hit your head. The bus was so high you couldn't stand up. So we had her chauffeur [Author's note: John Stevenson] double it. He was not a stunt man. But he doubled her, dressed in her clothes, and Seitz had him do the scene. He caught the top—it was oily, greasy up there—and he fell down on his head eighteen feet below. He was killed. The irony of it was that his wife and daughter, a girl in her teens, were extras and they saw it happen. Now, it wasn't a stuntman, and the driver of the bus didn't know what speed to go. Seitz was so broken up he couldn't do the sequence. I had to finish it for him. I rehearsed the speed with the bus driver, and with a stuntman who knew just how to escape being knocked off himself. It worked out all right. But those kinds of stunts have got to be rehearsed.

JT: Hadn't Seitz worked enough in serials to know better than to use a chauffeur for a stunt like that?

SB: Yes, but I guess it wasn't so much his fault as the time of day . . . we had to rush . . . the day, the light was going, and it was one of those hasty things. He thought he would be lucky and get it. Stunting is its own field.

JT: At Columbia, a lot of the Sam Katzman serials were based on comic strips, weren't they?

SB: Yes, they were. I did BATMAN AND ROBIN with Robert Lowery, who just died recently; and BLACKHAWK with Kirk Alyn, and of course SUPERMAN . . .

JT: Do you remember the budgets on the last serials?

SB: Well, the budgets were getting thinned out. They were cheating a lot, using stock footage.

JT: When they wrote the script, had they already planned the stock footage they were going to use?

SB: Oh, yes!

JT: In other words, the script was written with the stock footage in mind?

SB: Yes, and then they would write one episode at the end, a retrospect episode, which would recap everything that we had done and it was shot for practically nothing. The budgets were usually $8,000 an episode.

JT: What about the animation they used for SUPERMAN flying?

SB: We spent more on that. I remember the animation was $32 a foot. That was the price given to Katzman and he accepted it. They would have drawn it a little better for twice that amount.

JT: And Sam wanted to cut budget?

SB: I don't think he had the money to spend. The animator said he would draw it this way for $32, and a different way for $64—more in relief, to match the characters we were using.

JT: How were things different at Columbia than at Pathé?

SB: At Pathé, things weren't as expensive . . . and we shot more in continuity. I would shoot an episode a week. When, later on, they got to putting it up on the board, and watching costs, you would have your key sets and shoot that all at once. Time was cut down to twenty-one days, even as low as eighteen days.

JT: And the public never objected?

SB: I wasn't aware of it.

JT: Were the Columbia serials basically a one-shot proposition?

SB: Yes, one rehearsal and one take. As I got the crew geared up, I found that you couldn't sit down and figure out a shot, or they would let down, go out and have a smoke until you were ready. The minute I would finish a scene, I knew exactly what the next set was going to be. I would have it all mapped out. I would say "Cut!" and then, "Over here," keep the crew busy.

JT: How many cameras did you use at Columbia for interiors?

SB: One.

JT: Just one? Did you block the whole script out with different placements for just one camera?

SB: Yes.

JT: Was this a matter of budget, or a matter of preference?

SB: Well, budget had something to do with it. If you had two cameras, you would have to hire two cameramen. I would pace myself. The day's work was always heavy, but a lot of times in pacing myself, and taking short cuts, I could finish pretty early and then sort it out and get more quality into it. So, I would have the time for a sequence coming up that I wanted to play with a bit. I would shoot a lot of stuff I could sluff off and get away with, and then when I got to a scene where I wanted to get a lot of angles in it, I would have the chance.

JT: Do you recall anything about Republic?

SB: When I went over to Republic, the other directors, the stuntmen told me, I must shoot a full panorama of a fight routine. They would knock everything up and break everything, then stop and set everything up again so that we could get close-ups. I knew how to match shots better than that. I would say to the stuntman, "Now, I want you to start from here . . . it's going to take a minute . . . a minute and eight seconds to do that. But I want it done well." So I would set them up and they fought in a corner. Then I would cut in my principals, right while I could remember their positions . . . and we wouldn't have to set up all the props again. Now I would match shots and bring my principals out of it and take them right into the next routine, cut, put in the doubles, and go on. All the editor had to do was assemble the footage. The other way fights took twice as long.

JT: You cut all of this in the camera?

SB: Yes. I don't know any other director who cut in the camera as I did, because I had had a lot of cutting experience at Pathé. It worked out great. When I first worked for Katzman, when I first sent him my first week's dailies, I was up in Kernville, and he said, "You're not getting enough picture . . . you're not getting enough picture . . . we're going to be short." I tried to convince him on the 'phone that he would have more than he needed. He was so used to all this repetitious stuff, to all this repeating, do it in a long shot . . . do a close-up . . . dialogue and everything. He would get all those tremendous dailies in there. He'd be there for two or three hours looking at all that, and only about a third would end up in the picture. I didn't have any waste, and finally when he got the first few episodes cut he had plenty of film. Not only did I save time, but I saved him money on his lab bill. And I always said to Katzman . . . "You aren't paying me anything on these pictures. I'm saving you my salary on the lab bill." And I did.

(Concluded on Page 248)

Released by Columbia Pictures in 1939
Written for TEMI by
Jim Stringham / Bob Malcomson

Columbia's FLYING G-MEN opened with enemy agents attacking America's defense industries from an underground airbase on Flame Island, off-shore headquarters of a vast espionage ring. Four government investigators—Davis, Cummings, Andrews, and Bronson—are ordered by their chief, Carlton, to deal with the menace. When a friend, inventor Ed McKay, is murdered in an attempt to steal the plans of his radio controlled bomber, these four veteran aviators decide to operate outside the law when necessary to destroy the nation's enemies. A medal is divided among them as their insignia, and one will fly into action against the spies as "The Black Falcon."

McKay's bomber is stolen. Bronson recovers it, but is shot down by an enemy pursuit ship as he flies from Flame Island. The Black Falcon appears in his own fighter to avenge his friend. McKay's sister, Babs (Lorna Gray), is given Bronson's quarter-medal and joins Andrews (Robert Paige), Davis (Richard Fiske), and Cummings (James Craig) in their fight. Also aiding them are Billy McKay (Sammy McKim) and the youngsters of the Junior Air Defenders. The group is successful in protecting a working model of McKay's plane, then blocks attempts to steal the formula of a new gun metal and to photograph secret fortifications from the air.

The Professor, mysterious spy chief, orders all-out war against them. Trailing a suspect, airplane manufacturer Hamilton, The Black Falcon is shot down over the ranch which is the spies' mainland headquarters. He bails out, and, with the others, narrowly escapes death when a secret laboratory is blown up. They rescue the innocent Hamilton and take refuge in the ranch house. Their enemies attack with truckloads of explosives, and the G-Men see the headquarters utterly destroyed.

Brewster (Forbes Murray), an airport official, becomes a suspect. As the G-Men close in on him, he kidnaps Babs and escapes to Flame Island with the new bomber. They follow, rescue Babs under cover of a smoke screen, and escape to the spies' radio room. The Black Falcon, revealed as Andrews, takes off in the bomber and blasts the spies' anti-aircraft gun, then, with more well-directed bombs, breaks up their attack on his partners. Government planes arrive with reinforcements to take the rest of the gang into custody. The threat to the nation is ended.

●

CHAPTER TITLES

1. **Challenge in the Sky**
2. **Flight of the Condemned**
3. **The Vulture's Nest**
4. **The Falcon Strikes**
5. **Flight from Death**
6. **Phantom of the Sky**
7. **Trapped by Radio**
8. **The Midnight Watch**
9. **Wings of Terror**
10. **Flaming Wreckage**
11. **While A Nation Sleeps**
12. **Sealed Orders**
13. **Flame Island**
14. **Jaws of Death**
15. **The Falcon's Reward**

Center L. to R.: Bart Davis (Richard Fiske); Billy McKay (Sammy McKim); John Cummings (James Craig) and Hal Andrews (Robert Paige). The three G-men frequently enlisted the aid of Billy and other Junior Air Defenders.

One of the trio of G-Men (a fourth is killed in Chapter #1) assumes the role of the masked Black Falcon, an agent of justice who can strike swiftly (without prior approval from bureaucratic Washington). Feminine interest is provided by Babs McKay (Lorna Gray, a/k/a Adrian Booth).

Climax of Chapter #7 has Andrews and Davis trapped in a hayloft when a terrific explosion rocks the barn. (Note: In zippered jacket is Jerry Frank. Battling with Richard Fiske is Al Ferguson.)

To hide (from the audience) the identity of the Black Falcon, his companion G-Men either are not shown when the Falcon dons the mask, or wear a disguise themselves — white uniforms.

George DeNormand (see related story on pg. 224) did the stunt work for actor Robert Paige, revealed as the Black Falcon in Chapter #14.

DeNormand, sans goggles and helmet, is shown here with Tex Rankin. (This photo, and the one at left, are courtesy of DeNormand.)

MEN OF ACTION

Story by CECIL M. PARKHURST

Clayton Moore (left) and Tom Steele in a scene from G-MEN NEVER FORGET (Rep., '48).

TOM STEELE, stuntman extraordinary, has had an active career which spans 38 years (to date) in one of the most difficult and demanding phases of movie-making.

In answer to questions put to him recently about his start in films, Tom said: "*I was playing polo while attending Stanford University and thru that contact received encouragement to come to Hollywood because of my background in horsework.*"

Tom began in films in 1934 at Mascot Studios but his first serial work was in Republic's UNDERSEA KINGDOM (pg. 90) in 1936. He played both a soldier of Atlantis and a Robot, a role which he repeated in MYSTERIOUS DOCTOR SATAN. Chapter five of that serial is titled "Doctor Satan's Man of Steel," an unintended pun by the script's writers.

William Newell, Robert Wilcox as *The Copperhead* (stunted for by Dave Sharpe), and *Dr. Satan's* mechanical robot (Steele).

Dale Van Sickel with Steele (doubling Jim Bannon, a Mountie) in DANGERS OF THE CANADIAN MOUNTED (Rep., '48).

Over the next twenty years Tom worked for all of the serial producing companies, but the bulk of his work was done at Republic where he appeared in the majority of their 66 serials doubling such well known stars as Allan Lane, Clayton Moore and Rod Cameron. It was as Rex Bennett (Cameron) that Tom provided some of the screen's most exciting and memorable fight sequences in G-MEN VS. THE BLACK DRAGON and SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA.

In addition, Tom doubled such one-shot serial stars as Bruce Edwards, Bill Henry, Jim Bannon, Marten Lamont, Larry Thompson and George Turner, all of whom seemed to be picked more for their physical resemblance to Tom Steele than for their acting talent.

Tom credits veteran stuntman George DeNormand with getting him his first stunt work. *"Through George nine of us got started. We called ourselves 'The Cousins,' and the group included Dave Sharpe, Ken Terrell, Jimmy Fawcett, Eddie Parker, Bud Wolfe, Carey Loftin, Loren Riebe and Louie Tomei. Out of that group there are three of us left—Sharpe, Loftin and myself—still active in stunt work."*

"There were others, of course. Duke Green and Dale Van Sickel worked with me the most on serials." Along with Ken Terrell the quartet worked in such serials as KING of THE MOUNTIES, DAREDEVILS OF THE WEST, CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE TIGER WOMAN and ZORRO'S BLACK WHIP, among others. With wild leaps and the use of breakaway furniture they would reduce a room to rubble in a matter of minutes. The foursome has put on film fight routines which have since become classics.

Battling Harry Lauter is Steele in oriental make-up in TRADER TOM OF THE CHINA SEAS (Rep., '54).

Tom's career reached its peak in 1943 when he played the title role in THE MASKED MARVEL, a story written specifically to display his stunting ability—yet he received no screen credit since stuntmen were not billed, even tho he played a small character role in addition to his stunt work.

Tom's wide-legged, flat-footed fighting style was easily recognized by fans in more than fifty serials and in Western features where he doubled Bill Elliott and Allan Lane in all their Red Ryder features and Lane's "Rocky" Lane films—nearly 80 Republic Westerns in all.

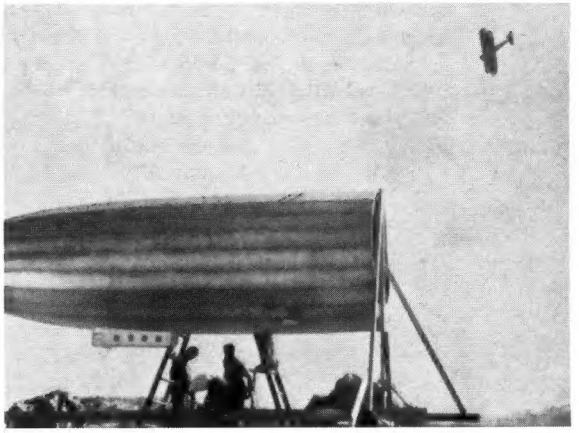
Still quite active, Tom took part in the wild chase sequence in "Bullitt" and more recently in "Diamonds Are Forever," another film in which spectacular auto driving played an important part. In addition he has worked in "Ben", "Conquest of the Planet of the Apes" and "The New Centurians".

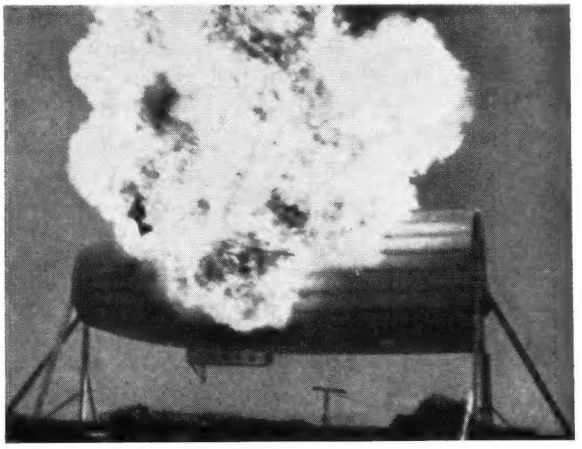
"So you can see I'm working and enjoying the best of health. I'm grateful for the continued interest of my fans and am glad they enjoyed and still appreciate the fun and work of the serials."

TEMI pays tribute to Tom Steele, who helped put action-plus into the serials and brought us back to the theater week after week seeking a thrill a minute. He *never* failed to deliver!

Tom Steele (left) stunting for Richard Bailey in MANHUNT OF MYSTERY ISLAND (Rep., '45).

Van Sickel is Steele's antagonist in THE MASKED MARVEL (Rep., '43).





BEHIND THE SCENES

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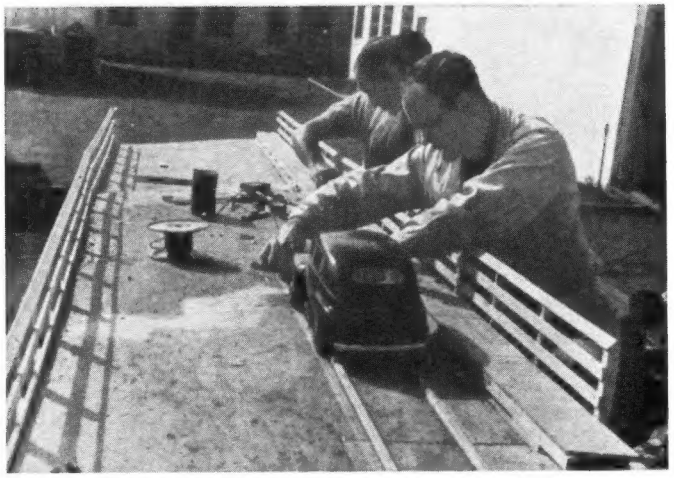
Models Stage Crackup of Plane and Dirigible

How they used miniatures in setting the stage for realistic movies of an airplane and dirigible crash in midair was explained recently by special effects men. A tiny airplane was released from a 40-foot tower so it would slide down a pair of thin wires rigged up for the purpose, smashing into a model dirigible at the end of the run. On its downward trip the plane struck a switch in its path, thus exploding 12 ounces of flash and black powder and one and one-half gallons of gasoline with which the dirigible was loaded. Flames shot thirty feet into the air and burning fragments from the two models scattered through the air. To give the dirigible the appearance of motion through clouds during the filming of the early scenes before the actual crash, titanium tetrachloride, or "liquid smoke," was blown in front of the camera. The dirigible model was covered with canvas and painted a silver color.

Editor's Note: The action occurred at the end of Chapter 12 of KING OF THE TEXAS RANGERS, Republic, 1941.

Toys Save Cars and Tires in Movie Thrillers

When automobiles are demolished before your eyes in movie-thriller crack-ups, sighing over the loss of the car and a set of good tires may be wasted emotion, since in most scenes of destruction only miniatures are involved. For instance, a thrilling auto chase in the serial "Spy Smasher," produced by Republic Pictures, ended in the blasting of a wooden bridge which plunged the car into the depths beneath, all done without the loss of anything really valuable. Up to the point where the chase entered upon the bridge, legitimate cars were used; but for the thrilling finale, special effects director Howard Lydecker substituted a duplicate of the bridge in miniature and a tiny sedan took the place of the real one. Under the bridge, small powder bombs were placed, and over these were set toy balloons filled with gasoline. The explosion shot balls of fire 10 feet upward then hurled broken bits of wood 20 feet. (Top photo shows special effects workmen trimming bridge tracks to make cars swerve.)



Editor's Note: This sequence was not, as indicated in the article, from SPY SMASHER, but rather was used in Chapter 13 of DICK TRACY VS. CRIME, INC., Republic, 1941.

Originally these two articles appeared in "Popular Mechanics" magazine respectively in April and August of 1942. They were sent along by Howard Schweig, Pittsburgh, Pa., to share with TEMI readers.

THOSE ENDURING SERIAL FANS

Letters from TEMI fans are most welcome. However, the information supplied in these columns by readers is based on their opinions. The editor does not necessarily purport the info to be complete, exact or accurate.

BOOK REVIEW

This is a word of warning to all potential buyers to avoid a new book called "To Be Continued". It's apparently about sound serials and is published in Canada by General Publishing Company (Crown Publishers, Inc. in U.S.). They should be ashamed of themselves. Obviously they didn't know what a piece of crap they were getting themselves associated with. This book is such a shoddy, incomplete, erroneous and sloppy work that it is a perfect case for the return of book burning in the public square. The two gentlemen credited with this shockingly junky effort are Ken Weiss and Ed Goodgold and neither one of them, I am positive, know anything whatsoever about serials. The book is so full of errors, omissions and false information that I spent one full hour making corrections in the picture captions and even then, I didn't get them all!!! Let me say the copy of the book I have was given to me. I absolutely refused to pay $12.95 ($9.95 U.S.) for this abysmal garbage. If you did, then go to General Publishing (Crown in U.S.) and demand your money back. If you know of anyone contemplating buying this ghastly sham, warn them to save their money. As for the serial synopses, they are so incomplete as to be useless. Some don't even have pictures with them! And there are no chapter titles!

Don Daynard
Unionville, Ontario

Editor's Note: Please do not blame the book sellers, two of whom have advertised in TEMI, for this sham. Mr. Daynard is quite correct in his review and the fault lies with the publisher and the authors. By the way, the review is reprinted from Captain George's "Penny Dreadful", published by the Whizzbang Organization, Toronto, Ontario.

Here are a few of the errors: Al Wilson is identified as Wheeler Oakman; Al Bridge is also called out as Oakman, and this is difficult to believe (but true), Bridge is identified not once, but twice, as Bryant Washburn; Tom Steele is identified as Dick Purcell . . . and Henry Brandon as Buck Rogers (Larry Crabbe), Lane Chandler as Don Douglas, Harry Cording as Ted Mapes, Jacqueline Dalya as Anne Nagel, Ken Terrell as Allan Lane, Jack Ingram as George Chesebro, John Crawford as Sam Flint, Dale Van Sickel as Don Haggerty, House Peters, Jr. as Tristram Coffin, Smith Ballew as Robert Kellard. It's an endless list of inexcusable errors. TEMI is not perfect, but "To Be Continued . . . " is an insult to the intelligence, and pocketbook, of anyone with even a passing interest in sound serials.

On the plus side, there is currently available a very good book on serials: "Days of Thrills and Adventure" by Alan Barbour.

BUSTER CRABBE

In the Crabbe interview (pg. 193) I see that good ole Bus is still using his stock remark that the beams from the ray guns were created by scratching the negative frame by frame. He told Don Shay and I the very same thing and although we had the courtesy not to contradict him, we decided to omit it from the interview text that appeared in "Kaleidoscope" magazine (1966).

The rays are actually the result of matt animation achieved by film laboratory technicians who mask out the trajectory of the ray's beam on a work print containing the "live action" of the actors. This is then used to create a series of frame matts in which an animator can produce a ray that is perfectly synchronized with the action of the actors and in precise alignment with any objects appearing on the work print. The animated ray is then photographed against a solid black background on a separate film. Later the two negatives are sandwiched together and run thru an optical printer to produce the combined effect desired on a master negative. A more sophisticated example of this technique of celluloid superimposition was in Chapter 1 of BUCK ROGERS wherein the two pilots from Hidden City use their ray pistols to melt the section of the glacier encasing the dirigible containing the dormant bodies of Buck and Buddy.

By using the same process a non-animated ray beam appeared in several Flash Gordon episodes. This is well exemplified in FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE where Ming horrifies Dale by instructing Captain Torch to focus his ray rifle on a defenseless Flash, laying prostrate below the palace balcony where Ming and his entourage are gathered. The incinerating visual effect of this supposedly intense ray was accomplished by photographing the kaleidoscopic patterns of light from an arc lamp penetrating swirling masses of smoke from a studio smoke blowing machine. As it is finally viewed on film, it appears to be a slowly spiraling beam of light.

Val Warren
Fishkill, N.Y.

* * *

NECROLOGY

Another name for your "Chapter 13" department is Al Kikume, 78, character actor who played Warren Hull's assistant, Lother, in the Columbia serial MANDRAKE, THE MAGICIAN

('39); also he played the friendly native chieftain, Lutembi, in Republic's JUNGLE GIRL ('41). He died 3/27/72.

Edward R. Billings
Nashua, New Hampshire

Kenneth MacDonald, 70, passed away in Richmond, Ind. in early May, 1972. He was in many Columbia serials, usually a heavy, including OVERLAND WITH KIT CARSON and THE PHANTOM. (His photo appears on pg. 147.)

Johnny Stoginski
Chicago, Illinois

In regard to the article on page 231, Carleton G. Young is the actor who passed away on 7/11/71 at age 64. C.G.Y. portrayed "The Count of Monte Cristo" on radio, and also appeared in such films as "Thrill of a Romance," "Queen of Burlesque," "Smash-Up" and "The Kissing Bandit".

Carleton Young, the actor in serials, is still living. I believe he works as a public relations representative, or similar capacity, for either a real estate company or mortgage firm.

Many motion picture directories lump these two actors together—the same fate shared by Charles King, the singer, and Charles King, the Western heavy.

Jerry Mezerow
Placentia, California

Carleton Young

Carleton G. Young

Robert "Buzz" Henry (pgs. 214 and 231) also played Buzzy in THE ROARING WEST (Univ., '35), his *first* of four serials.

Basil Dickey (pg. 231) was born in 1880 and died 6/7/58 at age 77. He was a "sound" serial screen play writer for Universal, Victory, Columbia and Republic. His credits began with THE ACE OF SCOTLAND YARD ('29) and concluded with FEDERAL AGENTS VS. UNDERWORLD, INC. ('48)—totaling 71 (out of 231 sound serials produced). Of course, he also worked on silent chapter plays including THE PERILS OF PAULINE (1914).

Byron Foulger (pg. 212), b. 8/27/1899 and d. 4/4/1970, is killed off by *The Spider* in DICK TRACY ('37) and *The Octopus* in THE SPIDER'S WEB ('39)—both executions occuring in Chapter one for failing to serve the best interests of his master. Foulger gains sweet revenge (as far as serials go) by becoming the "master" and surviving all 13 episodes of Universal's last cliffhanger, THE MYSTERIOUS MR. M, only to meet a watery death in a submarine.

George McGrail (b. 1/5/1900 and d. 5/31/1952), page 225, was a/k/a George Magrill and McGrill. He appeared in 20 sound serials. I believe Magrill was his real name.

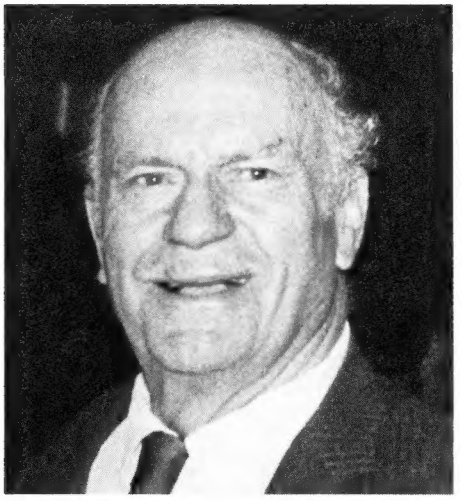
William John Ryan
Bronx, New York

TEMI / EDITOR & PUBLISHER • ROBERT M. MALCOMSON
CHIEF — ILLUSTRATIONS DIVISION • JAMES A. STRINGHAM

EDITOR'S NOTES

THANKS TO: Earl Blair, Jr. for his personal hospitality at Multicon '72 in Oklahoma City. Blair will be one of the guiding forces behind HOUSTONCON June 21 thru 24, 1973—and he has already obtained Dave Sharpe's promise to put in an appearance . . . Johnny Hagner (Director, Hollywood Stuntmen's Hall of Fame) 37808 Rudall Avenue, Palmdale, Calif. 93550, for loaning us photos 16 and 17, pg. 238 . . . and the many readers who have taken the time to write and encourage us in our efforts, and render assistance in helping TEMI to keep the serial record straight.

Universal was not represented in this Chapter. To make amends, their first *two* 1939 releases will be covered in TEMI #18.



DICK ALEXANDER (pgs. 27, 124, 129, 138, 192 and 203) is alive and healthy. Photo, recently taken at a Hollywood party, is by Richard Harrison.

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(Spencer Bennet story — cont'd from page 241.)

JT: At Columbia, during the Katzman period, would you say from the time of your first Columbia serials to BLAZING THE OVERLAND TRAIL the budgets were getting smaller and smaller?

SB: Yes, yes they were.

JT: Would you say the declining production values contributed something to the disappearance of the serial?

SB: Yes, that is very true. They kept getting to be less and less. And another thing . . . the fact that I would meet a budget. They would give me so many days to shoot a picture. I would come in and Katzman would figure if this fella can make that, maybe we'll cut a day or two off the next one. He would almost force you to do it. He knew that you couldn't make it, but he wanted to know that you were trying. Usually I did it, and that was the mistake I made.

[Note: Jon Tuska, who authored this article, is Executive Editor of "Views & Reviews", 633 W. Wisconsin, Suite 1700, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53203. The magazine is currently running a detailed, well-researched, and entertaining series of articles on the "sound" Mascot serials.]

SECRET SERVICE IN DARKEST AFRICA (1943) was the first of 13 serials Spencer Gordon Bennet directed for Republic Pictures—and a particular favorite of his. L. to R. are Ken Terrell, Rod Cameron and Frederic Brunn. It had a unique chapter title: "Funeral Arrangements Completed" (episode #8).

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